



Government announces measures against illegal use of electric scooters on public roads





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How therapy llamas are transforming the American travel experience

The Bright Side News

CHICAGO – If you find yourself navigating the bustling terminals of O'Hare International Airport this week, don't be surprised if you encounter a pair of soulful eyes and a set of remarkably fuzzy ears waiting for you near Gate B12. Meet Beni and Prince, two of the newest recruits in a nationwide movement to bring "pawsitive" vibes to the high-stress world of air travel. They aren't your typical airport employees; they are part of a growing fleet of certified therapy llamas currently "lighting up" major U.S. travel hubs.



Terminally ill hospice patient Helen Kress feeds Pisco, a 13-year-old therapy llama, during his visit to the Hospice of Saint John on September 1, 2009 in Lakewood, Colorado.

For decades, therapy dogs have been a staple of airport stress-relief programs. However, 2026 has officially become the year of the camelid. From Portland to Philadelphia, travelers are putting down their luggage to embrace these gentle, four-legged ambassadors. The result? A documented "smile spike" that airport officials say is transforming the atmosphere of long

security lines and delayed departures.

"I was having a truly stressful morning after my flight was pushed back four hours," says Sarah Jenkins, a business traveler en route to Seattle. "I was hunched over my laptop, frustrated, when I felt a gentle nudge. I looked up, and there was

Prince the llama wearing a colorful pom-pom harness. You can't stay angry when you're looking at a llama. You just can't."

The initiative, dubbed "Llamas on the Landing," was born from a partnership between local sanctuary farms and airport hospi-

talilty boards. Unlike dogs, which often seek out active play, llamas are known for their calm, observant nature. They possess a unique "zen" quality, standing still while travelers stroke their soft fleece or snap a "llama-selfie." Their height also makes them perfectly eye-level with both sitting adults

and standing children, creating an immediate, grounding connection.

Naysa Arisidou, a lead handler with the program, explains that the animals undergo rigorous training to become accustomed to the sights and sounds of a modern airport. "They aren't bothered by the roar of jet engines or the rattle of suitcases," Arisidou says. "They are naturally intuitive animals. They seem to know exactly who in the terminal needs a moment of peace. We often see them gravitate toward nervous flyers or families with restless toddlers."

The benefits aren't just anecdotal. Early data from a pilot program at Denver International suggests that the presence of therapy animals correlates with a significant decrease in reported traveler anxiety and a boost in overall "passenger satisfaction" scores. For airport staff, the llamas are a welcome distraction that helps de-escalate the tension that often bubbles up at help desks. □

U.S. eases access to marijuana for medical use

Washington, United States

The U.S. government on Thursday made it easier for Americans to use cannabis for medical reasons by reclassifying the drug and enabling more research into its safety and efficacy. Marijuana is now described as having moderate to low addiction potential, "ex-

panding patients' access to treatments and empowering doctors to make better-informed healthcare decisions," acting attorney general Todd Blanche said.

The government appears to be catching up with broad societal shifts in the

United States -- adult marijuana use for any reason is legal in 24 states and the US capital, and approved for medicinal use in 40 states.

Until Thursday, it was still ranked federally as "Schedule I," a category for drugs, including heroin and methamphetamine, with no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse.

Marijuana products approved or regulated by federal or state agencies have now been moved to the third rung of a five-level Drug Schedule. Schedule III substances, which include ketamine and anabolic steroids, are considered to have medical value and less potential for abuse.

The Department of Justice said Thursday's move followed up on President Donald Trump's executive

order in December on increasing medical marijuana research.

It also called for expedited hearings beginning in June that would "provide a timely and legally compliant pathway to evaluate broader changes to marijuana's status under federal law," a DOJ statement said.

- 'Begging' for change -

The long-awaited move does not legalize marijuana use in states where it is still banned or sanction its use as a recreational drug. But Trump in December said it would make it better available for "legitimate medical uses" such as for people with cancer and chronic pain.

"We have people begging for me to do this. People that are in great pain," Trump said in the Oval Office.

Trump, who was surrounded by white-coated medical experts for the announcement, added that the order "is not the legalization" of marijuana. The 79-year-old teetotaler added: "I've always told my children, don't take drugs, no drinking, no smoking, and just stay away from drugs."

U.S. presidents cannot unilaterally reclassify a drug. Trump's order directed the Department of Justice to expedite the process. Democrat Joe Biden's administration pursued reclassification, but efforts were not completed before Trump took office in early 2025.

The U.S. has a patchwork of state-level regulations regarding the commercial distribution, recreational possession and personal cultivation of cannabis. □



Marijuana is held during the annual NYC Cannabis Parade & Rally in support of the legalization of marijuana for recreational and medical use, on May 1, 2021 in New York City.

U.N. leadership hopefuls stress need for peace and restoring confidence

United Nations, United States

Contenders for next UN secretary-general made their case this week for a United Nations more invested in peace, but avoided taking positions that could antagonize the member states who will choose the world body's next chief.

Chile's Michelle Bachelet, Argentina's Rafael Grossi, Costa Rica's Rebeca Grynspan and Senegal's Macky Sall are all hoping to succeed Antonio Guterres on January 1, 2027, when his second five-year term ends.

Each candidate spent three hours this week answering wide-ranging questions from the 193 member states and representatives of civil society.

However, "a lot of diplomats are a bit cynical about the hearings," Richard Gowan of the International Crisis Group told AFP. "There is a widespread suspicion that the US and other vetoes in the Security Council will select a winner in private and minimize the Assembly's role in the process."

The question-and-answer sessions, dubbed "interactive dialogues," were introduced in 2016.

The General Assembly, where every member state has a seat, can only elect the secretary-general upon



This combination of pictures created on April 16, 2026 shows (L/R) Senegal's president Macky Sall at a European Union forum on Global gateway investment initiative at the EU headquarters in Brussels on October 25, 2023, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, speaking during a press conference in Lima, Secretary-General of the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Rebeca Grynspan prior to a press conference ahead of the 16th UN conference on trade and development, in Geneva, on October 13, 2025 and the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, speaking during the presentation of his candidacy for the United Nations secretary-general in Buenos Aires on December 22, 2025.

the recommendation of the Security Council, where the five permanent members -- the United States, China, Russia, Britain and France -- hold veto power. Much of what the contenders said was "formulaic" but they did send some "important messages," according to Gowan.

He said Grossi emphasized "how fragile the UN is today" and appeared more "radical" than Guterres on reform.

All the candidates stressed the urgent need to restore confidence in a United Nations teetering on the brink of financial collapse. Its relevance has also been called into question in a world facing a level of

armed conflict not seen since World War II.

Chile's Bachelet, a former UN human rights chief, said the secretary-general should be "physically present in the field" wherever problems need solving -- a position also taken by Grossi.

Sall, a former president of Senegal, suggested a "re-invented role" so that the UN might "regain its place at the global table."

Some have criticized Guterres for failing to exert influence over conflicts in Ukraine or the Middle East. Grynspan said the next UN chief "needs to take a risk" and lamented: "We have become a risk-conservative organization."

"The UN only fails when we don't try, we have to try," added Grynspan, who as head of UN Trade and Development negotiated a deal that facilitated the export of Ukrainian grain following the 2022 Russian invasion.

- Waiting in the wings -

The candidates acknowledged the link between the UN's three pillars of peace, human rights and development, while emphasizing the organization's primary role in upholding the first tenet.

US President Donald Trump has called for the UN to return to its "original mission" of peace.

Very few of the questions

focused on specific conflicts, and the candidates largely refrained from answering in concrete terms, preferring instead to invoke a commitment to the UN Charter.

When asked about Gaza, however, Grynspan urged "unrestricted" entry of humanitarian aid and voiced support for a long-term solution for two states to live side-by-side in "peace and security."

Sall highlighted the "human tragedy" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Candidates' past stances and actions will undoubtedly influence the final selection.

Republican lawmakers have already called on Washington to block Bachelet due to her defense of abortion rights.

Grossi, the current head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, is involved in sensitive matters such as the response to Iran's nuclear programme.

The five Security Council permanent members remain tight-lipped about their intentions, and other contenders for UN chief might still emerge.

"I think that there are still quite a few candidates circling and waiting to see how things play out" before declaring their candidacy, Gowan said. □

China stealing U.S. AI technology: White House official

San Francisco, United States

The White House on Thursday accused Chinese entities of a massive effort to steal U.S. artificial intelligence technology and vowed to take action to prevent the alleged theft.

"The U.S. has evidence that foreign entities, primarily in China, are running industrial-scale distillation campaigns to steal American AI," White House science and technology chief Michael Kratsios said in a post on X.

"We will be taking action to protect American innovation."

Distillation is a common practice within AI development, often used by companies to create cheaper, smaller versions of their own models.

In February, U.S. AI developer Anthropic accused three Chinese firms, DeepSeek,

Moonshot AI and MiniMax, of running campaigns to illicitly extract capabilities from its Claude chatbot, describing it as intellectual property theft.

That same month, ChatGPT creator OpenAI sent a letter to U.S. legislators accusing DeepSeek of using distillation techniques amid "ongoing efforts to free-ride on the capabilities developed by OpenAI and other U.S. frontier labs."

Kratsios did not name any specific foreign entities in his post but said they "are using tens of thousands of proxies and jailbreaking techniques in coordinated campaigns to systematically extract American breakthroughs."

The accusations come ahead of a planned May 14 summit in Beijing between U.S. President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. □



U.S. President Donald Trump speaks with Michael Kratsios, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, during a roundtable on Ratepayer Protection Pledge in the Indian Treaty Room at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House campus in Washington, DC on March 4, 2026.

How Illinois is pioneering the new era of sustainable cinema

The Bright Side News

CHICAGO – For decades, the film industry has been synonymous with the glitz and glamour of the silver screen, but it has also carried a less glittering reputation for physical waste. From massive plywood sets tossed into landfills to idling diesel generators powering nighttime shoots, the "magic of movies" has often left a heavy footprint. However, a quiet revolution is taking place in the heart of the Midwest. This week, Illinois officially claimed the title of the nation's "Greenest Film Set," ushering in a transformative era where blockbuster storytelling and environmental stewardship go hand in hand.

The catalyst for this change is a first-of-its-kind legislative package championed by Governor JB Pritzker. The "Green Screen Credit," which went into full effect today, provides significant tax incentives for productions that meet rigorous sustainability benchmarks. While other states have long offered financial breaks to lure big-budget studios, Illinois is the first to tie those dollars directly to the health of the planet.

"We are proving that you don't have to choose between a thriving economy and a thriving environment," Governor Pritzker announced at a ribbon-cutting ceremony held at a



Illinois Democratic Governor JB Pritzker, a potential future presidential candidate, speaks during the National Action Network (NAN) annual convention on April 09, 2026, in New York City.

solar-powered soundstage on Chicago's West Side. "Illinois is ready to be the home for creators who want their legacy to be found in the stories they tell, not the waste they leave behind."

The impact of this policy is already visible on the streets of Chicago and in the rolling fields of the Illinois countryside. On the set of the upcoming sci-fi epic Prism of Hope, the traditional hum of loud, carbon-emitting generators has been replaced by the near-silent whir of massive mobile battery arrays. These "clean power" units are charged via portable solar

blankets spread across the tops of equipment trailers. The change is so profound that sound engineers report cleaner audio recordings, free from the mechanical rumble that used to plague outdoor shoots.

The sustainability efforts extend far beyond power sources. The traditional "craft services" table—once a graveyard of plastic water bottles and Styrofoam containers—has undergone a total makeover. Under the new Illinois guidelines, productions are partnering with local "zero-waste" catering companies. Compostable

bamboo utensils, reusable glass containers, and locally sourced organic produce are now the industry standard. Even more impressively, any surplus food is re-directed daily to local shelters through a coordinated digital logistics network, ensuring that no meal goes to waste.

Construction, often the most wasteful part of filmmaking, is also seeing a radical shift. Instead of burning or binning sets after "wrap," Illinois productions are now utilizing a "Set-Cycle" warehouse system. Huge cityscapes and period-piece interiors are designed to be modular.

Once a scene is finished, the materials are disassembled and cataloged in a digital library for other filmmakers to rent or repurpose. This circular economy is not only saving thousands of tons of lumber but is also lowering costs for independent filmmakers who can now access high-quality sets for a fraction of the price of building new ones.

"It has changed the culture on set," says Elena Rodriguez, a veteran production designer who moved from Los Angeles to take advantage of the Illinois program. "When the crew sees that the production cares about the earth, it creates a sense of shared purpose. We aren't just making a movie; we're participating in a movement. There's a lightness and a pride in the work that I haven't felt in twenty years of filmmaking."

Environmental advocates are equally enthusiastic. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency estimates that if the current trend continues, the state's film industry could reduce its carbon emissions by up to 40% within the next three years. Furthermore, the initiative is creating thousands of new "green-collar" jobs, from solar technicians specialized in film equipment to sustainable wardrobe designers who utilize recycled textiles and plant-based dyes. □



This illustration photograph shows the logo of the US multinational technology Meta company displayed on a smartphone in Mulhouse, eastern France on February 11, 2026.

New York, United States

Meta plans to cut a tenth of its workforce, looking for productivity gains from its remaining workers as it invests heavily in artificial intelligence.

Meta will lay off about 8,000 employees and leave thousands of other positions unfilled next month, a source told AFP.

The move comes as co-founder and chief executive

Meta plans 10% layoffs as AI spending soars: source

Mark Zuckerberg makes a priority of delivering "superintelligence" in a costly AI race against rivals including Amazon, Google, Microsoft and OpenAI.

Reports on Thursday also indicated that Microsoft is looking to trim its ranks with voluntary buyouts of some US employees in an unprecedented move by the tech stalwart founded in 1975.

About seven percent of US employees at Microsoft were reported to be eligible for an offer aimed at workers senior director level or lower whose years of employment and age add up to 70 or more,

according to a CNBC report. Microsoft, which has also been pouring billions of dollars into AI, did not respond to a request for comment.

Meta in January reported quarterly earnings that topped market expectations, as revenue grew along with investments in AI.

Meanwhile costs tallied \$35.15 billion, an increase of 40 percent from the same period a year earlier, the earnings reported noted. Capital expenses, including infrastructure such as data centers to power AI, were \$22.14 billion in the quarter,

according to the company. Meta anticipated capital expenditures in the \$115 billion to \$135 billion range this fiscal year, driven by increased investment in Meta Superintelligence Labs and its core business.

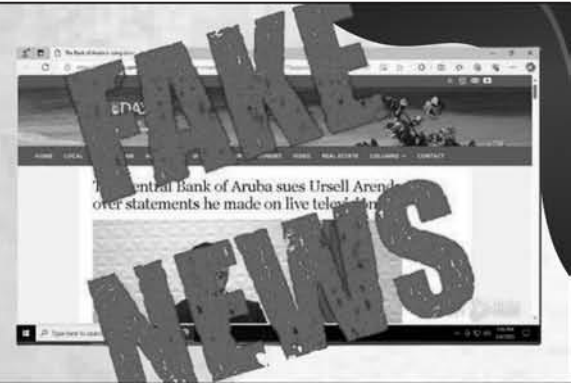
"I'm looking forward to advancing personal superintelligence for people around the world in 2026," Zuckerberg said on an earnings call.

Meta is locked in a bitter rivalry with other tech behemoths racing to invest heavily in AI, aiming to ensure the technology generates profits in the not-so-distant future. □

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'Free Timmy!': Beached whale grips and divides Germany

Berlin, Germany

The sad saga of a humpback whale stranded a month ago on the German coast has sparked a flood of compassion but also a media frenzy, angry spats, conspiracy theories and death threats.

As Germans have followed the travails of the sea mammal, dubbed "Timmy" by a newspaper, on their live news tickers, TV screens and influencers' YouTube and TikTok channels, some worry about what its epic struggle says about a nation's collective psyche.

Sociologist Christian Stegbauer said the whale, a highly intelligent and social animal, had become an object of human "projections", with people engaging, especially on social media, in "a kind of competition on who cares most for the animal".

While rescue workers have



A stranded humpback whale, covered with white blankets to protect its skin, blows a fountain off the Baltic Sea coast at the island of Poel, near the small village of Weitendorf-Hof, northern Germany, on April 19, 2026.

exhausted themselves in cold water, the odyssey has also featured heated rifts between veterinarians and self-proclaimed

"whale-whisperers", fundraising scams and esoteric attempts to heal the whale through chanting.

The drama began when

the 13-metre (over 40-foot) cetacean was beached on a Baltic Sea sandbank on March 23 at the seaside resort Timmendorfer Strand

near Luebeck, far from its Atlantic Ocean habitat, with remains of a fishing net in its mouth and in poor physical condition.

Since then a series of rescue attempts involving volunteers, environmental groups, maritime police, work crews with excavators and millionaire sponsors have repeatedly raised hopes that were quickly dashed, as the whale has swum off, zig-zagged and ended up beached again. German media have broadcast the hapless creature lying motionless in shallow water for hours on end, with men in diving suits splashing water on it using kayak paddles.

Tide tables have become the stuff of national interest, and rare moments when the exhausted whale has blown water or flapped its fin have warranted breaking news bulletins. □

Over 250 Indians claiming descent from biblical tribe land in Israel

Tel Aviv, Israel

More than 250 Indians claiming descent from a biblical tribe landed at Tel Aviv airport on Thursday, as part of a government operation to relocate them to Israel.

The newcomers passed under a balloon arch in blue and white, the colors of the Israeli flag, as dozens of well-wishers welcomed them with a traditional Jewish song.

They were the first "Bnei Menashe" ("Sons of Manasseh") to arrive in Israel since the government decided in November to fund the immigration of around 4,600 members of

the community from the state of Manipur in north-east India.

The community claims to descend from Manasseh, the forefather of one of the biblical "lost tribes" of Israel exiled in 720 BC by Assyrian conquerors.

The Shavei Israel organisation, which seeks to trace the descendants of the lost tribes, said that some 4,000 Bnei Menashe have already immigrated to Israel since the 1990s, with around 7,000 others still living in India.

Their oral history tells of a centuries-long exodus through Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet and China, all

the while adhering to certain Jewish religious practices, like circumcision.

In India, they were converted to Christianity by 19th-century missionaries. The 250 Bnei Menashe who arrived on Thursday are to settle in northern Israel, according to the ministry of integration.

They will need to convert in order to become Israeli citizens.

Immigration Minister Ofir Sofer, who welcomed the newcomers at the airport, told AFP that their arrival marked a "historic moment".

"This is the beginning of an operation that will allow



Jewish immigrants of the Bnei Menashe tribe of the Jewish community in Manipur, northeast India, are met by family members as they arrive at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv on December 24, 2012.

the entire community to immigrate, 1,200 per year," he said.

Manipur has seen periodic clashes for nearly three years between the predominantly Hindu Meitei majority and the mainly

Christian Kuki community that have killed more than 250 people.

Since April 2025, more than 18,000 Jews have immigrated to Israel, down 18 percent over the previous year. □

Pirate gangs prowl Bangladesh's Sundarbans forest

Mongla, Bangladesh

A crackdown seemed to contain the pirate gangs terrorising the world's largest mangrove forest, but now a decade later they're back kidnapping and extorting the people trying to make a living on its labyrinth of rivers.

The criminal resurgence pushed by poverty and political chaos has again made Bangladesh's Sundarbans forest a dangerous and potentially costly place to operate.

Mandal, a 47-year-old crab hunter, was kidnapped and held captive for nearly a month before being released for a 40,000 taka (\$370) ransom.

"My family cried hard," said Mandal, who asked to be identified by his first name for fear of reprisals, as he recalled his capture.

He and several other fishermen were sleeping on their boat when a gang stormed aboard, despite their employer having already paid extortion money to an armed group to protect them.

The attackers dragged the men onto another vessel and a gunfight erupted between the kidnappers and



This aerial photograph taken on March 30, 2026 shows a distributary of the Rupsha river flowing through the lush green cover at Dacope in Bangladesh's Khulna district near the Sundarbans, a mangrove forest plagued by pirates targeting fishermen and honey hunters.

the fishermen's protectors. "At one point the two groups started exchanging fire like rain. I was hanging from the branch of a tree while others rushed into the jungle," he said.

- Abundant resource -

Investigative reporter Mohsin Ul Hakim, who helped facilitate the surrender of hundreds of pirates between 2016 and 2018, said

many gangs operate as enforcers on the Sundarbans' waterways.

"They (pirates) are hirelings of some big fish traders who through their bully boys keep control over the water mass of the Sundarbans," Hakim told AFP.

Some pirates are linked to arms traffickers or are simply criminals. Young men, often driven by poverty and debts, join the bands

to make quick money.

"In many cases they get trapped and can never return home," Hakim said.

The Sundarbans' waters yield close to 29,000 tonnes of fish annually.

Control of the abundant resource has long fuelled violence.

A government anti-piracy drive in 2009 lasted six years and saw several extrajudicial killings.

Though hundreds eventually surrendered, law enforcement could never fully dismantle the networks.

Around a dozen groups are active again, according to security agencies.

A fisherman, requesting anonymity, said some gangs resurfaced after taking advantage of the political chaos sparked by the 2024 uprising that toppled Sheikh Hasina's government.

"All of a sudden the entire Sundarbans was reclaimed by different groups," he said. "They have hiked the ransom sometimes up to 100,000 taka per fisherman."

- Treacherous -

Bangladesh Coast Guard spokesman Lt Commander Shamsul Arefin said units have been conducting regular operations and seizing dozens of weapons including German-made arms.

"We have conducted some 100 raids, detained 56 pirates, seized 78 arms and other ammunition including cartridges, air guns and locally made firearms," he told AFP, characterising recent attacks as isolated incidents. □

With ciggies in short supply, Gaza smokers turn to dried jute

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

Though Gazans normally use molokhia, or jute leaves, for soup, Abu Yahya Helles coats the crumbled, dried leaves in liquid

nicotine and rolls them into cigarettes as a tobacco alternative.

In war-ravaged Gaza, where shortages are still acute, some are now smoking Helles' home-

made roll-ups as a cheaper option as cigarette prices have skyrocketed due to Israel's blockade of many basic goods.

Helles knows his smokes are no replacement for the real thing, but with the price of a single cigarette soaring from 1 Israeli shekel to between 30 and 40 shekels (from 33 cents to \$10-13), he has plenty of customers.

"This is in no way a substitute for cigarettes because at the end of the day, this is molokhia with nicotine added to it", he told AFP while preparing a batch.

At his makeshift stall on a busy Gaza City street, he uses a syringe to inject liquid nicotine into a bag of dried jute leaves, using a large one-kilogramme bottle of the type often confiscated by the Israeli military

from trucks entering Gaza. He gives the small plastic bag a shake to infuse the leaves, then uses cigarette papers to roll the "tobacco".

Although the street is lined with massive piles of broken concrete from apartment buildings destroyed during over two years of war in Gaza, it is busy.

Despite the October 2025 ceasefire, the local authorities say they have been unable to bring in the equipment they need to remove the rubble nor the materials they need to start rebuilding the tiny territory.

Nivin Samir, 53, says she smoked a pack a day for 20 years, but recently switched to molokhia cigarettes.

"They taste and smell awful. I smoke several a day, maybe to vent my anger,

or to live out my fantasy of enjoying them with a cup of coffee," said Samir, who has lived in a tent in the southern city of Khan Yunis since her home was razed in an air strike.

- Toxic substances? -

Another Gaza City cigarette seller called Mohammed Helles said people weren't smoking molokhia out of choice.

"We've resorted to smoking dried molokhia leaves laced with nicotine as a substitute for imported cigarettes. We want cigarettes to be imported again so we can smoke normal tobacco," he said. But even the supply of molokhia is not guaranteed whether it's grown in Gaza or imported because Israel controls all access points as well as about half of the territory. □



A Palestinian lights a cigarette made of molokhia leaves -also known as jute mallow, normally used in cooking- at the tobacco market on Omar Al-Mukhtar Street, which traders and residents say they mixed with liquid nicotine and process, as smokers turn to improvised alternatives under continuing restrictions leading to severe shortages in Gaza City and across the enclave on April 19, 2026.

Government announces measures against illegal use of electric scooters on public roads

(Oranjestad)—During a press conference Tuesday morning, the Minister of Justice, Integration, Public Transport and Energy, Arthur Dowers, announced a new measure to address growing concerns related to the use and rental of electric scooters, e-scooters, and electric bicycles, mainly in the Palm Beach area. The situation has developed over a long period and has become a serious problem of order and safety, largely driven by a rapid increase in rental activity of these types of vehicles without proper permits.

Minister Dowers explained that since assuming responsibility as minister, he has made traffic safety a key priority. A special traffic commission was established to analyze the different risks within the island's traffic system. Initial results quickly showed significant problems in tourist areas, especially Palm Beach, where a large number of electric scooters have con-

tributed to disorder, danger, and an increased risk of accidents.

After analyzing the risks associated with the use of these types of vehicles on public roads, the government concluded that it is necessary to strengthen control measures and begin stricter enforcement of the law.

Minister Dowers explained that under current law, all electric scooters operating on public property are illegal. There is no legal basis in Aruba that permits the use of these vehicles on public roads or sidewalks. This rule applies in all cases without exception.

As a result, police authorities will begin a stronger enforcement campaign in the coming days. Individuals found riding electric scooters on public roads will be stopped, and the vehicles will be confiscated. This action is not limited to Palm Beach, but will also



extend to other areas where similar behavior has been observed, including main roads such as Waty Vos Boulevard and other neighborhoods.

Another important aspect of the problem is the commercial activity related to renting these vehicles. In Palm Beach, many of the scooters are offered for rent. However, according to Aruba's regulations, any business that wants to rent out vehicles must have a permit from the Department of Public Transport. Electric scooters, the minister indicated, do not have any legal category that allows for such permits to be issued, which means that all rental operations involving these types of vehicles are illegal.

In addition to their use on roads, the way these vehicles are left parked on sidewalks and other public spaces is also against the law. The minister explained that local ordinances prohibit parking vehicles on public property without government permission. In many cases, the scooters are left in public places, causing obstruction for pedestrians and contributing to disorder in the area. The minister indicated that this practice will also be addressed during the enforcement period.

For these reasons, the government made the announcement publicly, urging all operators to remove electric scooters, e-scooters, and electric bicycles from public spaces immediately. □



A quick snack for the road

Learn how to make the Aruban Pastechi!

(Oranjestad)—If you ever been to Aruba before, you probably heard of (and even tried) the Aruban Pastechi. Beloved by young and old, this tasty treat is a staple for party snacks, a quick lunch or even breakfast!

Here's how to make the Pastechi dough.

Ingredients:

- 4 cups of wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder (if using self-rising flour, omit baking powder)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 0.5 cup of melted butter
- 1 cup water
- 1 egg

Directions:

Sift your flour into a bowl and add all the dry ingredients before giving it a quick mix. Next add the butter, water and egg and mix until thor-

oughly combined. At this point, your dough will start to get sticky; time for an arm workout. Knead your dough into the bowl you are using or on a clean surface with some flour lightly dusted until its surface is smooth. You'll know your dough is ready when it doesn't stick to your hands or the surface on which you're kneading it. Let your dough rest covered for 15-20 minutes.

After resting, divide your dough into approximately 100 gram balls and roll it flat with a rolling pin. The thickness of the pastechi depends on your taste, but the average thinness would be around ¼ inch or so.

Filling for the pastechis varies according to your taste. The easiest and most common filling you'll find in Aruba is a simple cheese filling. For this, we usually use shredded Gouda, but feel free to use any cheese that melts well when frying



the pastry.

Place the filling on your rolled out piece of dough, fold it in half and pinch the sides shut with a fork. If you have a folding tool, feel free to use it for this process. Your pastechi is ready for the fryer!

If you want to store some pastechis for later use, you can freeze them. A good tip is to place a piece of wax paper in between each pastechi if you are to store them

on top of one another. This way the pastechis don't stick to each other when defrosting.

Here in Aruba we enjoy pastechi at any time of the day, but it has become almost tradition to eat pastechis for breakfast on the way to work. Many roadside snack trucks sell pastechi from early morning to noon, and offer a variety of fillings like cheese; ham and cheese; ground beef and pulled chicken to name a few. □

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Aruba: The island of Aloes

ORANJESTAD – Aloe Vera, a succulent plant species, is renowned for its incredible properties for the skin. It is widely distributed and usually grows in tropical, semi-tropical and arid climates on the planet. But this plant also had a very prominent role in the history of Aruba, and its significance to the island's economy endures to this day.

The leaves of Aloe Vera contain a good amount of gel which when used topically, is great for the skin. Traditionally, Arubans use

this gel to treat minor burns and other skin ailments, or just to keep skin supple and looking bright and nourished. Aside from the gel, aloe contains a bitter, yellow substance (called aloin) which is a gentle but powerful laxative, and it is also the origin of the industry of aloe in Aruba.

Aloe vera was introduced in Aruba around 1840, when most of the island's inhabitants were farmers of little means. Dutch Governor Van Raders introduced the plant after it had been



introduced in other islands of the Caribbean to cultivate and harvest the aloe to produce the laxative.

Around 1920, about two-

thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes."

Under Commander Jan Helenus Ferguson (1866-1871), aloe experienced a boom, which is why there is a road named after him, which goes through the aloe fields. In the 19th century, Aruba was the main supplier of aloin for laxative, which was imported abroad to the United States and Europe. The aloin from Aruba and Curaçao was known to be one of the best in the world and was more expensive, which meant that at the time, it had significant economic impact, particularly for the local farmers.

However, by the time the

oil industry arrived on Aruba, it changed the labor market on Aruba, shifting away from agriculture. It would be after World War II that aloe would make a comeback. And eventually, as science learned about the amazing properties of aloe gel, the industry shifted from producing laxative to producing skin care. An interesting fact is that in 1951, the production of Aruban aloe amounted to around 30 percent of the total global production!

The impact and relevance of aloe is visible all around Aruba. While most homes will have a few plants for personal use and decoration, houses are also decorated with aloe motifs, and at some point, aloe even featured on post stamps. Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes." And in 1955, the aloe became a part of Aruba's coat of arms, symbolizing prosperity for the island. □

Images from the archive of the National Library of Aruba.

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Central Government Real Estate
Agency
Ministry of the Interior and
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For Sale

Detached
Houses in
the District
Pos Abao

Open Days

April 28, 2026
and
April 29, 2026

Auction Day

June 11, 2026

Starting **mid-April**, the Central Government Real Estate Agency (Rijksvastgoedbedrijf) will offer a new selection of former defense homes for sale in the **Pos Abao** district. These detached single-family houses, previously occupied by staff of the Dutch Ministry of Defense, provide a unique opportunity for buyers seeking spacious living in a well-established neighborhood. The properties will be sold individually through a notary via a voluntary auction, on behalf of the Dutch State.

Detached Houses

The spacious contemporary detached houses consist of a hall, living room, kitchen, three or four bedrooms, two bathrooms, a toilet, a storage area in the backgarden and a covered porch. The houses feature a garden and ample parking facilities. The existing enclosure is in the form of a stone wall with steel fencing.

Characteristics

Address	Lot size	House size	Bedrooms	Starting price
Cunucu Abao 13	812 m ²	130 m ²	4	AWG. 480.000,-
Cunucu Abao 13a	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 416.000,-
Cunucu Abao 13b	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 416.000,-
Cunucu Abao 13c	718 m ²	130 m ²	4	AWG. 460.800,-
Cunucu Abao 14	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 416.000,-
Cunucu Abao 14a	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 416.000,-
Cunucu Abao 14c	812 m ²	130 m ²	4	AWG. 480.000,-
Cunucu Abao 14d	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 416.000,-
Cunucu Abao 15	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 416.000,-
Cunucu Abao 15a	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 400.000,-
Cunucu Abao 15b	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 412.000,-
Cunucu Abao 15c	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 400.000,-
Cunucu Abao 15d	718 m ²	110 m ²	3	AWG. 412.000,-

Open Days

You are more than welcome to view the houses during the open days.
Cunucu Abao 13, 13a, 13b, 13c, 14, 14a, 14c, 14d, 15, 15a, 15b, 15c and 15d.

Tuesday, **April 28, 2026** from 9:00 AM till 12:00 PM
Wednesday, **April 29, 2026** from 1:30 PM to 4:30 PM

For Sale by Auction

The houses will be publicly and individually auctioned, in the presence of notary Mr R.E. Yarzagaray or his substitute, on **Thursday, June 11, 2026 at 10:00 AM**, Aruba Surfside Marina (Dolphin Room) at 7 L.G. Smith Blvd. in Oranjestad Aruba, via the Dutch Auction method.

The Notary's address is:

Notary Office Yarzagaray
L.G. Smith Boulevard 12
Oranjestad, Aruba
T: +297 582 2850

More information

More information regarding the houses, sales procedure and open days is available on our website or contact the Notary Office of Yarzagaray. To participate, prospective buyers must register with the notary two weeks prior to the auction.

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Alto Vista chapel and its link to Aruba's origins

According to Etnia Nativa, in the 18th century most of the inhabitants of Aruba were indigenous who lived on the north coast, one of the largest communities lived in Alto Vista.

As they were very religious, they had a chief with the name of Antonio Silvester who guided them in the Christian life and it was he who decided to build a stone chapel with a roof of corn rods, which would serve as a place of prayer. In 1750 it was blessed by Father Algemesi who came from Coro-Venezuela and appointed Domingo Antonio Silvester as the island's first prosecutor in the name of the Spanish crown and Rome. In 1752 the prosecution passed into the hands of Antonio Silvester's son-in-law, Miguel Álvarez, who continued to guide the parishioners in their prayers.

According to the book, The History of Alto Vista by R.H. Nooyen, it is not known when Domingo Antonio Silvester came to Aruba from Venezuela. The elders believe Antonio was a Spaniard. In 1780, father Joseph



Antonio de la Vegal called Bernardino Silvester, one of Antonio's sons with his wife Anna Cathalina Tromp, "neighbors and naturals of the island Aruba" and thus they became natives.

At the end of the eighteen century many inhabitants the island died as a result of the black fever epidemic and since people believed that the Alto Vista area was the most infected, they began to build their homes

further south within the Noord area, so the town of Noord began to grow into a community till getting its own Church. However religious festivals continued to be celebrated at this sacred native place, with the custom of arriving in procession to Alto Vista.

Two-hundred years after the beautiful time of Alto Vista, people can no longer see much of the town of Alto Vista from 1750. With

a lot of work they found the old foundations of the Church of the Queen of the Holiest Rosary to build a new chapel on the same place. The entire surrounding area was empty and desolated, making it hard to imagine that Alto Vista was a town at all. A hundred years later, people can see the remains of around twenty houses, some made of stone and others of clay. Nowadays, only around six of these

houses remain.

South of the chapel in the yard two graves can be observed, there was the cemetery which father Pablo de Algemesi blessed. It is not certain, but it is believed that the two graves belong to Antonio Silvester and Miguel Alvares, according to Nooyen. About 50 meters near the chapel there are still the markings of an old house, where Antonio and Bernardino Silvester would have lived. About 200 meters from the chapel there is a water tank which the locals call Tanki Cacique. In the past this tank was closed. But mostly water was brought out from the Poz di Noord, a well dug in the sand.

The chapel can be viewed from basically any point in the north side, even from Paradera and Sero Plat. All the historical remains around the chapel provide us with an idea on how the old people of Alto Vista used to live. Don't miss the opportunity to visit a place of historical significance with a window to Aruba's past. □

Lessons from our elders: Plants and fruits for medicinal use

ORANJESTAD—Though western medicine is now widely used for common illnesses and to keep our bodies healthy and happy, it is still very common in every household in Aruba (and around the world) to have staple home remedies that is passed on through generations. Here are some tips that our elders have passed on to us over the years.

Pineapple



Pineapple has more uses than topping it on your Christmas ham. Ac-

cording to elders, the skin of a pineapple is great to use to refresh your body. Clean the skin thoroughly and make tea or warapa* with it. It is said that this tea can also be drank after an operation on the ovaries or uterus. This gets rid of irritation and inflammation.

Arrowroot



Arrowroot is native to tropical America and can be sold as a pow-

der or whole. It is said that you can take arrowroot powder and make a "shalup" (porridge) for stomach pain or when you're feeling weak. You can make it with milk too, but it is advised to best use just water. You can also add prunes for a bit of sweetness. Arrowroot shalup is also good to treat an unhealthy gut or for diarrhea.

To make arrowroot shalup, boil a bit of water and add one tablespoon of arrowroot powder and stir continuously until you reach porridge consistency. If you make a shalup with milk, add a pinch of salt. Raw arrowroot powder can be used to powder babies.

Eggplant/Aubergine

Eggplants, or aubergines, are easy to find in supermarkets around the world and can be grown all year round on the island. Related to potato and tomato, eggplants are good to calm nerves. It can also be used to lower blood pressure, by steeping its leaves in boiled water and drinking it. You can also make



eggplant juice to help purify your blood. However, do make sure to drink slowly; let it mix with your spit and then swallow.

Eggplant kataplan* can also be used to treat skin tumors, abscesses and hemorrhoids. Eggplant kataplan can also be used externally to treat arthritis. □

*warapa: term referring to a water and sugar solution, a.k.a simple syrup.

*kataplan: porridge-like mixture used externally for wounds or parts of the body that are painful or swollen.

Forgotten gems: Open air movie theaters

(Oranjestad)—During the span of over 100 years, Aruba only saw five open air movie theaters. Now practically obsolete on the island, these theaters were once frequently visited by locals and migrants in the 20th century.

The first open air theater was constructed in 1920 and was commissioned by Shon Eduard (Eddy) de Veer. This theater was located at the Hotel Colombia in Oranjestad, which is now where the Aruban census office is located. The theater was simple; it only consisted of a screen, and visitors had to bring their own chairs to enjoy the popular silent movies of the time.

American migrants who worked in the refinery and lived in the Lago Colony in Sero Colorado also had their piece of the pie with their Open air Theatre, which formed part of the Esso Club, also known as the Pan-Am Club. It was at this theater that "Talkies" were first streamed, movies with sound. This theater mostly streamed American blockbusters for the American expats, this way making sure that

these migrant were not missing out on entertainment from their home land.

In the 1950's and 60's, Savaneta saw their own open air theater, located in front of the Marinier's Kazerne (Marine Barracks). This theater was mostly visited by the neighboring marines, who didn't have much entertainment other than movies at that time.

The last and most recent open air theater was constructed in the form of a drive-in theater. A popular American concept, the Drive Inn located in Balashi was a hot spot for teenagers, who had the habit of cramming all their friends in one car to go see the movies. For this phenomenon there was a separate price that you had to pay called the "car crash".

This theater closed around 2012, but was re-opened during the pandemic in July 2020, where movies were streamed on a gigantic screen set up in front of stacked containers. However, this nostalgic form of entertainment did not last



very long as it was closed again only a year or two later. Nowadays you can still see the stacked containers when you drive near the bridge in Balashi. □

Source: "De kolibrie op de rots en meer over de geschiedenis van Aruba" by Evert Bongers.

Up for a snorkeling adventure in Aruba? Top 3 shipwrecks to explore

(ORANJESTAD) – Aruba is not only the perfect vacation destination to sit back and relax on the sandy beaches but also has great snorkeling spots for passionate adventurers to explore. On the coast of the island, there are various shipwrecks that have become fan-favorites over the years. Here are the top 3 shipwrecks you should explore.

SS Antilla

Dubbed "The Ghost Ship", SS Antilla is the biggest and most visited shipwreck site off the coast of the island. Located in Malmok, this 400-foot ship's story is one of capture and sabotage during WWII.

After Germany invaded The Netherlands, Dutch authorities ordered the confinement of the ship's German crew, who were ported in Aruba because it needed to find a neutral port. The Dutch ordered the ship to be confiscated, but the German crew had other plans. Taking advantage of a delay caused by an anticipated armed resistance, the Germans started scuttling the

ship, opening her seacock and setting her ablaze.

Eventually, the crew was arrested, but SS Antilla could not be saved by the Dutch forces. The Dutch fired two rounds of their 35mm gun aboard the 'Aruba' at SS Antilla and left her to sink.

The shipwreck can only be reached by boat. The ship is visible from the surface and during your snorkeling trip you'll be surrounded by hundreds of tropical fishes,

but the shipwreck alone is already impressive enough.

SS Pedernales

Like the Antilla, the story of SS Pedernales dates to WWII. Pedernales was used as a lake tanker between Venezuela and Aruba, and sailed under British Flag. At this time, The US and Britain were using Aruba and Curacao as fuel stations for the war ships.

Under operation Neuland (disruption of British and American oil sources), Ger-

many fleets bombed Pedernales. The ship was later cut into three sections, two of which were taken to the US for reconstruction. The remaining part stayed in Aruba and was used as target practice. Eventually, the ship became a snorkeling site that has attracted many visitors throughout the years.

Pedernales lies on the north-west coast of Aruba, and is no more than 10 feet under water, making it an ideal site for snorkelers and divers of all levels.

Jane Sea Wreck

The Jane Sea Wreck lies near Palm Island at 100 feet underwater. Jane's story is heavily speculated, making her origin a tale of legends.

Launched in 1959, the 190-foot ship was initially called "Blackthorn". Her last owner, S&D Shipping Ltd. named her Jane Sea. Jane was a cement freighter between Venezuela and Aruba.

The story goes that the Jane Sea arrived one day at the Barcadera Harbor, where Aruban customs discovered

several tons of cocaine. The ship was confiscated and petitioned went out for her owner to claim her. However, several years went by and no one came forward to claim the ship, so dive operators decided to sink her as an artificial reef. This happened in 1988. Jane Sea earned the nick name Jane C, because of the illicit white powder discovered on board.

Jane is now beautifully overgrown with coral and is home to a diverse set of marine life, like turtles, octopus, crabs and sometimes even nurse sharks.

The stories behind these shipwrecks enriches their exploration and offers snorkelers and divers a glance into the past, as well as the beautiful marine life that have molded these wrecks into their home. So, grab your equipment and discover another side of what Aruba has to offer!

We highly recommend you embark on your adventure with the guide of a professional and be sure to take of yourself and Aruba's precious nature. □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 45 Plane

1 Baby's features bed

5 Multiplied by growth

10 Gave an edge

12 Operative

13 Holmes's beloved Irene

14 Terra —

15 Notice

16 Stifle

18 May

20 "Roses — red"

21 Banish

23 Composer Rorem

24 Dozes

26 Formerly owned

28 Singer

29 Fill fully

31 Bill

32 Commotion

36 Monastery address

39 Mine

40 Roofed patio

41 Moses of the track

43 Decree

44 Out of style

DOWN

1 Gorge

2 Roping contest

3 Harbor

4 Worker, e.g.

5 Folded food

6 "— You Babe"

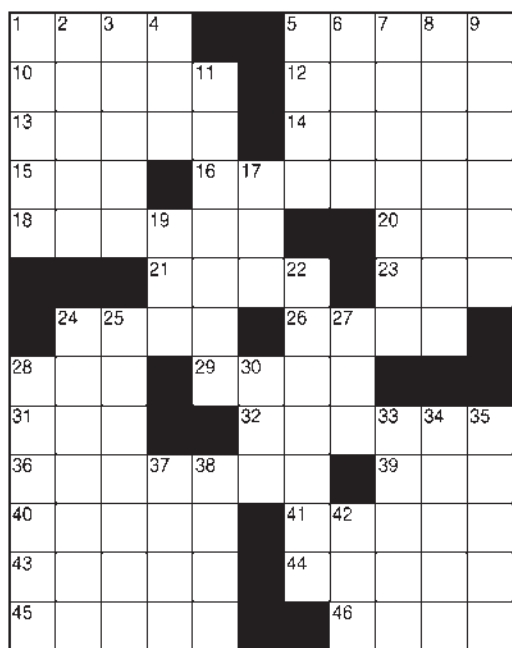
7 Flam-mable gas

8 Went in

9 Was rude, in a way

11 The

Lorax's creator



5-11

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

5-11

CRYPTOQUOTE

UM KWP YZUXT KWP QJS YWW

RHQAA YW HQTS Q NUMMSJSXGS.

KWP ZQLSX'Y RVSXY YZS XUIZY

EUYZ Q HWRDPUYW. — QMJUGQX

VJWLSJC

Cryptoquote: NO GOOD MOVIE IS TOO LONG AND NO BAD MOVIE IS SHORT ENOUGH. — ROGER EBERT

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic—but important—information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Drinking water



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the



store.

Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through

Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.



SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★★★

4/24

Answer to previous puzzle

3	8	7	2	5	1	4	6	9
5	6	1	4	8	9	2	7	3
2	9	4	3	7	6	5	8	1
9	2	3	7	4	8	1	5	6
6	4	8	5	1	3	9	2	7
1	7	5	9	6	2	3	4	8
4	5	6	1	9	7	8	3	2
8	3	9	6	2	5	7	1	4
7	1	2	8	3	4	6	9	5

Difficulty: ★★★

4/23

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OpenAI says new model adept at making AI better

San Francisco, United States

OpenAI released a new model it touts as its best yet for handling research work like making improved versions of itself, as rapid-fire releases by AI rivals pick up pace.

GPT-5.5 was billed as a "new class of intelligence" and comes just months after the launch of its predecessor.

"What is really special about this model is how much more it can do with less guidance," OpenAI co-founder and president Greg Brockman said at a briefing with journalists.

"It can look at an unclear problem and figure out just what needs to happen next."

The model is particularly adept at "agentic" coding and computer use in which digital assistants independently tend to tasks as directed, according to the San Francisco-based startup behind ChatGPT.

"It feels like it's setting the foundation for how we're going to do computer work going forward," Brockman said.

In the short term, OpenAI is focused on letting humans act as "orchestrators" while AI models do the "heavy lifting," chief research officer Mark Chen said at the briefing.

OpenAI was adamant that it built its strongest safeguards to date into GPT-5.5 "to reduce misuse, especially for bio and cyber capabilities."

That means a ramped-up tendency for the latest model to refuse requests to attempt "cyber-related activities," OpenAI executives said.

Rival company Anthropic has held back a new Claude Mythos AI model deemed so adept at finding vulnerabilities in software it could be a boon for hackers.

Anthropic restricted the release of Mythos to select major tech firms to give



(L-R) Srinivas Narayanan and Rachel Metz speak onstage during the "How OpenAI Builds" panel at the HumanX Conference San Francisco 2026 at Moscone Center South on April 07, 2026 in San Francisco, California.

them a head start in fixing cybersecurity vulnerabilities and is looking into reports of unauthorized use of the model.

"There are enough model releases that it's probably going to be hard to distinguish one from another," Brockman mused during the briefing.

"This model is a real step forward towards the kind of computing that we expect in the future, but it is one step, and we expect to see many."

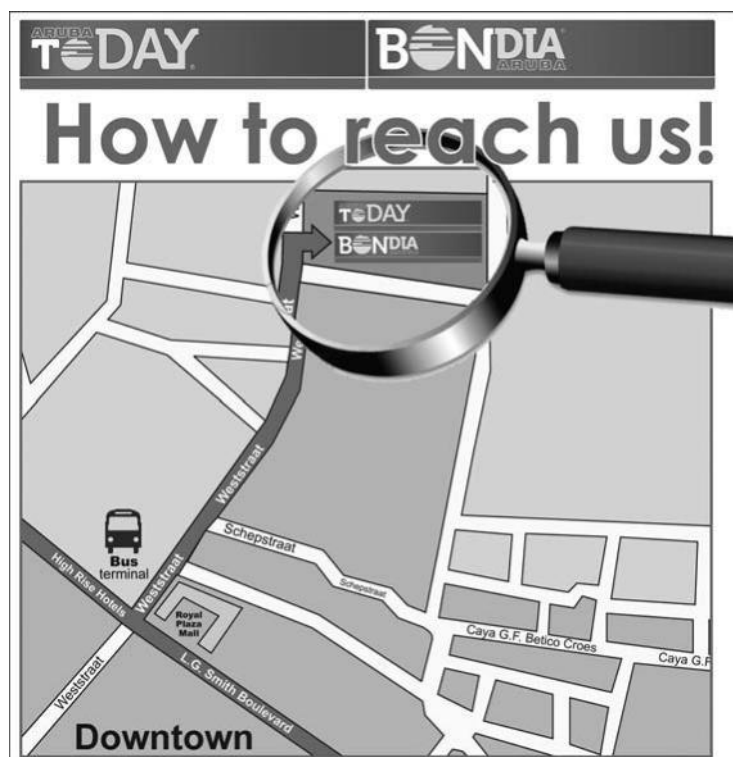
According to OpenAI, artificial general intelligence

in which computers think as well or better than people is no longer theoretical, and AI models that research how to essentially improve themselves take the world further in that direction.

The executives described GPT-5.5 "as one of the clearest steps yet toward models that can accelerate AI research itself."

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San Nicolas: Seroe Preto
Tel. 584 4833

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Police Noord	527 3200
Police Sta. Cruz	527 2900
Police San Nicolas	584 5000
Police Tipline	11141
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Red Cross	582 2219

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Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

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FAVI- Visually Impaired Tel. 582 5051
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Narcotics Anonymous Tel. 583 8989
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Child Abuse Prevention Tel. 582 4433
Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

'Dancing in their hands': Japan wig masters set stage alive

Tokyo, Japan

Every actor in kabuki a traditional Japanese performing art celebrated for its striking makeup and elaborate costumes relies on one final, essential element to fully inhabit their role: the wig.

Ahead of a show at the famed Kabuki-za theatre in central Tokyo, wig master Tadashi Kamoji carefully places a topknot creation on a young performer in a flamboyant kimono costume.

"A kabuki actor can't just walk onto the stage as he is... it's only when he puts on a wig that he truly becomes a kabuki performer," 60-year-old Kamoji told AFP.

"So we must take pride in our job with a sense of very heavy responsibility."

Often hidden behind the curtain, the profession has found itself in the international spotlight after "Kokuho" a box-office hit about two "onnagata",



This photo taken on March 11, 2026 shows wig master Tadashi Kamoji creating a wig for kabuki actors at his atelier in Tokyo.

male players of female kabuki roles was nominated for Best Makeup and Hairstyling at the Oscars this year.

Dating back to the 17th century, Kabuki is a fusion of dance, drama and music, and sees actors don ornate costumes, wigs and heavy makeup for performances in old dialect on elaborate sets.

After a craftsman creates

the wigs using human hair, Kamoji's job is to style them. But his role goes beyond that of hairdresser.

"You cannot do a good job if you don't grasp the character's nature," said Kamoji, a fourth-generation "tokoyama" who joined the profession at 18.

Whether it's a middle-aged man with a strong sense of justice, or a high-ranking courtesan, a wig serves to

convey age, social status, occupation and personality.

At his atelier, Kamoji spent two hours fashioning the wig for the young actor, sculpting beautifully curved sides and a topknot called a "mage" a classic hairstyle modern Japanese no longer wear for his sumo wrestler role.

Kneeling on a tatami floor, he sectioned the hair us-

ing a traditional comb and smoothed it with steaming irons, occasionally pulling a string with his teeth to secure strands.

These specialists are "truly indispensable," the wig's 33-year-old recipient Nakamura Tanenosuke, told AFP. "There is almost no kabuki performance without wigs," said the actor, who has been working with the masters since the age of five and is sporting Kamoji's artistry this month for his show about a noble family feud.

- 'The final touch' -

Backstage at the Kabuki-za theatre, Tanenosuke covers his face in thick white foundation and his assistants help him pull on a large, navy-and-white striped kimono.

"The wig is the final touch that completes the transformation. I see each step as a switch leading to that exact moment when you fully become the character," Tanenosuke said.

"As well as the artistry of the actors, the beauty of the costumes and stage sets is also key to the audience's enjoyment, and I believe the wigs play a part too." □

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Maggie Gyllenhaal to lead Venice Film Festival jury

Rome, Italy

American actress and filmmaker Maggie Gyllenhaal will head up the jury of the Venice Film Festival, organisers said Thursday.

Gyllenhaal and the other jurors will select the winner

of the prestigious Golden Lion award for Best Film at the festival, which takes place in September.

Gyllenhaal, 48, made her director's debut with her adaptation of Elena Ferrante's "The Lost Daugh-

ter", for which she won the festival's Best Screenplay award in 2021.

Gyllenhaal said in a statement she was "thrilled to accept the invitation to lead this year's Venice Film Festival jury".

"Venice has always supported truthful, singular voices and I am honored to play a part in continuing that brave and necessary tradition," she said.



U.S. Writer and Director Maggie Gyllenhaal poses upon arrival for the world premiere for the film 'The Bride' in central London on February 26, 2026.

Festival director Alberto Barbera praised Gyllenhaal as "an actress capable of giving voice to challenging and multifaceted characters" and "an original filmmaker".

"Having her lead our jury means we can count on an authoritative and independent voice," he said. The Venice Film Festival is

the oldest of its kind in the world.

It takes place every year and forms part of the Venice Biennale, a famed series of arts festivals.

The Biennale recently drew fire for allowing Russia to participate in this year's art event, the first time the country will be included since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said Russia's participation in the Biennale is "morally wrong" in a statement released Tuesday, and reiterated the EU's intention to cut its funding of the festival.

"While Russia bombs museums, destroys churches and seeks to erase Ukrainian culture, it should not be allowed to exhibit its own," she said. □



Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder handles the ball while being defended by Dillon Brooks #3 of the Phoenix Suns during the second half in Game Two of the Western Conference First Round NBA Playoffs at Paycom Center on April 22, 2026 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Thunder roll past Suns, Pistons bounce back to level series with Magic

Los Angeles, United States

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 37 points to propel the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 120-107 victory over Phoenix and a 2-0 lead in their NBA playoff series, as Detroit topped Orlando to knot their series at 1-1 on Wednesday.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Gilgeous-Alexander led all scorers as the defending champion Thunder took a commanding lead in their best-of-seven Western Conference first-round series with another comprehensive victory.

"Shai made the right play all night," Thunder coach Mark Daigneault said. "His floor game was outstanding. He seemed to spray it all over the place, had a great tempo and got us really good shots."

Chet Holmgren scored 11 of his 19 points in the third quarter, when he also produced three of his four blocked shots.

Jalen Williams also scored 19, but the forward limited to just 33 games in the regular season exited in the third quarter, the team saying he apparently aggravated a hamstring injury.

The Thunder, trying to become the first repeat NBA champions since Golden

State in 2017 and 2018, didn't miss a beat.

They pushed their lead to as many as 26 points early in the fourth quarter and repelled a Suns surge that saw Phoenix cut the deficit to 10 with less than four minutes remaining.

"All we can do is play next man up, and we built that muscle throughout the season pretty well," Gilgeous-Alexander said of the latest injury to Williams. "I'm super confident in this team to be able to go and get the job done no matter who's out there."

Gilgeous-Alexander, a finalist for MVP again this season and the newly named Clutch Player of the Year for his performances late in close games, had an injury scare himself in the first quarter.

He came up wincing and holding his left hand after a hard fall under the basket but said after the game there was no lasting damage.

"I'm great," he said. "Ready to go."

Dillon Brooks scored 30 points and Devin Booker added 22 for the Suns, who will try to turn things around when they host games three and four.

In Detroit, the Pistons used dominant defense and a third-quarter scoring spree to beat the Orlando Magic 98-83.

Cade Cunningham scored 27 points and handed out 11 assists and Tobias Harris added 16 points and 11 rebounds for Eastern Conference top seeds Detroit, who were stunned in game one of the best-of-seven series.

- Energy and effort -

Clearly stung by that upset on their home floor, the Pistons set an early defensive tone with seven of their 11 blocks in the first quarter, but it was tied 46-46 at half-time.

The Pistons opened the third quarter on an 11-0 scoring run to finally gain some separation and by the time they polished off a 38-16 third period they were in total control.

"We knew that first half wasn't to our standards of playing and we had to really figure out defensively how we were going to impact the game," Harris said.

"I thought we came out with just the type of energy and the type of effort that we needed on the defensive end. □



Curacao's head coach Fred Rutten speaks to the media in Melbourne on March 30, 2026, ahead of their international friendly football match against Australia.

Rights groups warn World Cup visitors over U.S. travel

New York, United States

More than 120 rights groups including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) issued a travel advisory on Thursday warning that visitors to the 2026 World Cup could face "serious rights violations" due to the U.S. government's immigration policies.

The coalition said fans, players, journalists and other travelers to World Cup games in the United States risked being affected by what it described as the Trump administration's "draconian immigration and anti-human rights agenda."

The grouping called on football's world governing body FIFA whose president, Gianni Infantino has close ties to Donald Trump to lobby the US government to ensure the safety of all travelers to the tournament.

"FIFA has been paying lip service to human rights while cozying up with the Trump administration, putting millions of people at risk of being harmed and their basic rights violated," said Jamil Dakwar, ACLU human rights program director.

"It's past time that FIFA use its leverage to push for meaningful policy changes and binding assurances that will make people feel safe to travel and enjoy the games."

The coalition advisory warned that foreigners visiting the United States for the World Cup face specific risks, including "arbitrary denial of entry and risk of arrest, detention or deportation; invasive social media screening and searches of electronic devices; violent and unconstitutional immigration enforcement and racial profiling."

The advisory also said visitors potentially faced "suppression of speech and protest and increased surveillance; cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and even death" while detained by US Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The majority of matches at the World Cup 78 out of 104 are scheduled to take place in the United States, which is co-hosting the tournament alongside Canada and Mexico.

Four qualified nations Iran, Haiti, Senegal, and Ivory Coast may find themselves without their supporters due to travel bans imposed by the US government, as Donald Trump has made anti-immigration policy the centerpiece of his second term.

Washington has assured that the administration's immigration crackdowns measures do not affect tourist visas and, by extension, fans holding tickets for the World Cup. □



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Sabalenka fights rust to reach third round of Madrid Open

Madrid, Spain

Aryna Sabalenka shook off some rust to post her first victory of the season on clay and extend her winning streak to 13 matches on Thursday in Madrid.

The world number one, who was playing her first match since she completed the "Sunshine Double" by winning Indian Wells and Miami last month, committed 26 unforced errors in her 7-5, 6-3 win over American Peyton Stearns in the second round in the Spanish capital.

The defending champion, in search of a fourth career title at the Caja Magica, converted four of 12 break points against Stearns, double-faulted five times, and dropped serve twice, before she made it over the finish line to set up a third-round meeting with Romanian Jaqueline Cristian.

"I'm super happy to start

with a win, even though maybe the tennis wasn't that good, but I felt like with every game I was playing, the better I was playing, so I really hope in the next one I bring a better performance," said Sabalenka,

who has won 24 of her 25 matches so far in 2026. Earlier on Manolo Santana Stadium, Iga Swiatek made quick work of her opening test in Madrid, breezing past Daria Snigur 6-1, 6-2.

The Polish fourth seed needed just 61 minutes to move past Snigur, who was coming off the first tour-level main draw victory of her career on clay over Daria Kasatkina.

The Ukrainian qualifier saved four match points against Kasatkina on Wednesday, and secured the win by clinching the longest first-to-seven tie-break at tour-level in eight years with a 15-13 scoreline.

Snigur had little fight left in her for her clash with Swiatek, who barring a brief blip early in the second set was in fierce form as she continues her quest for a first clay-court title since she claimed a fourth Roland Garros crown nearly two years ago.

"I'm very happy. Madrid is a special place to play, because of how special the tournament is, but also because of the conditions, so I'm happy that I adjusted well to them and was solid and just playing my game," said Swiatek, who is contesting her second tournament under the guidance of her new coach Francis Roig. □



Belarus' tennis player Aryna Sabalenka poses with her Best Sportswoman Award during the 27th Laureus World Sports Awards gala in Madrid on April 20, 2026.